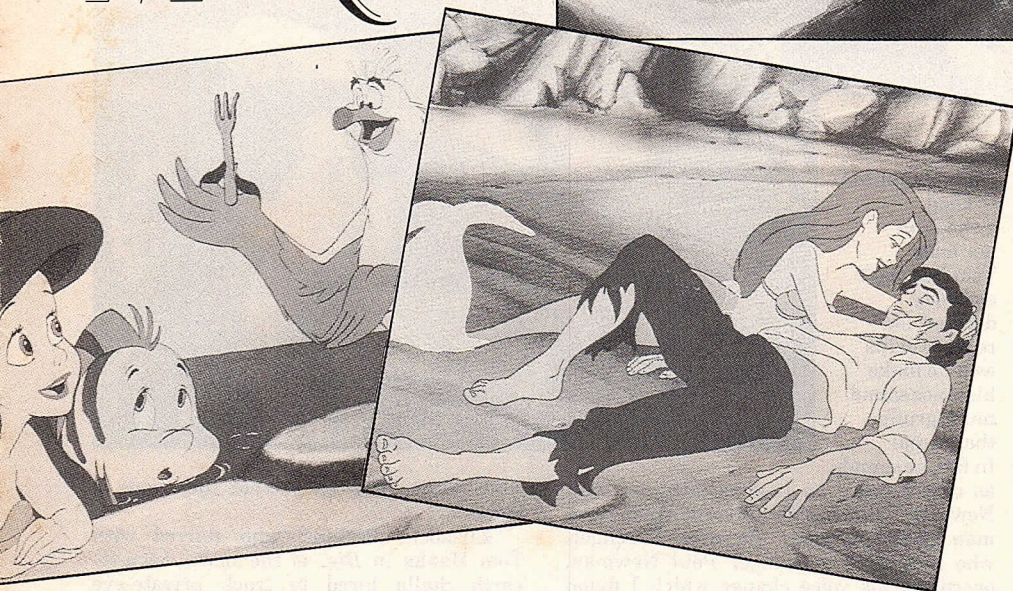
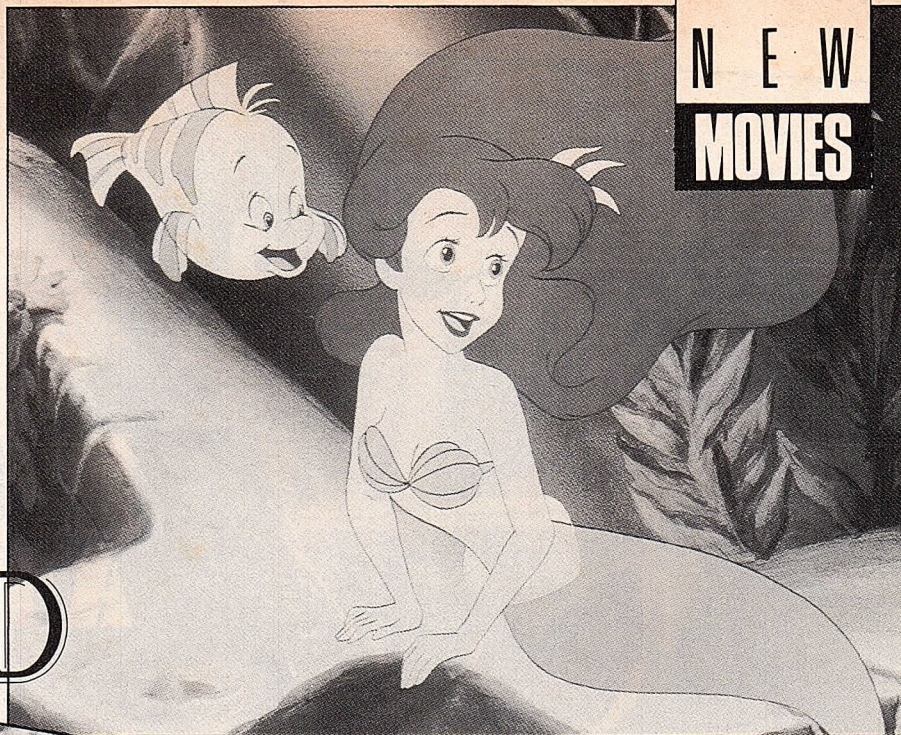


DAVID QUINLAN reviews
the latest animated feature
from the studios of
Walt Disney

● FOR the first time in over half a century, since they made a 10-minute version of *The Ugly Duckling* in 1938, the Disney Studios have turned to the work of Hans Christian Andersen for a new cartoon, and this time of feature length.

A large team of artists and technicians

THE LITTLE MERMAID



worked for nearly three years to produce *The Little Mermaid*. With two-thirds of the film set under water, innovative animation techniques and an abundance of effects animation were required to enhance the illusion.

Effects animators hand-crafted hundreds of thousands of bubbles, not to mention reflective light patterns, distortions and other tricks of their unique trade. The studio reckons that *Mermaid* features the most extensive use of such animated effects in any of their films since *Fantasia*.

Even the live-action models for the roles found their talents a trifle waterlogged. Sherri Stoner, a young performer with a Los Angeles comedy improvisation company, modelled for the title mermaid. Animators were able to study her movements as she swam about in an eight-feet deep glass tank.

Directing animator Mark Henn credits Sherri with inspiring some of Ariel's facial expressions as well. "She was able to bring to the character a unique and believable spark which we may not have thought of otherwise," he said. "Little things like the

way she bites her lip were incorporated into Ariel's personality, and helped bring the character alive."

One of the voices that helps bring a character to life is that of veteran black character star Sam Wright, recently seen on screen as Dizzy Gillespie in Clint Eastwood's *Bird*. But being a voice in a Disney cartoon feature has a very special meaning for Sam, who voices Sebastian the crab. "This is something I've been dying to do all my life," he chuckles. "In fact, it's the most important thing I've ever done. I'd always read how they selected the voices and how picky they were. I'm proud to be part of what I know is going to be a classic. I get a big smile on my face every time I think about it."

VERDICT

● A feature cartoon in the traditional Disney style, this is at the same time the studio's freshest and most enjoyable piece of animation since *The Great Mouse Detective*.

Although based on the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, in the Disney Studio's

hands, it becomes a virtual remake of *Sleeping Beauty*, even to the final battle with the villainous sea-witch Ursula.

The heroine is a teenager mermaid, Ariel, with a fascination for all things to do with humans. She even has a secret cavern full of knick-knacks. Rescuing a prince from a shipwreck, Ariel falls in love with him and sells her voice to the witch in return for three days as a human. If she fails to get the prince to give her a lover's kiss, she will turn back into a mermaid and forfeit her soul to Ursula as well.

Ariel is quite a feisty heroine by Disney standards, and her crab protector (a kind of West Indian Jiminy Cricket) and seagull sage are good characters. But the film is, as so often in Disney's work, dominated by its villainess. Ursula keeps two pet congers, just as Medusa in *The Rescuers* kept alligators, and she comes across as a kind of evil Mae West with eight tentacles instead of feet.

There are three good songs – "Part of Your World"; "Under the Sea" and "Kiss the Girl" – and all the children at the preview I attended seemed to gasp, laugh, snivel and ask questions in all the right places. It's too derivative to be a classic, but a nice lightweight goodie to add to the Disney hamper.

Producers
HOWARD ASHMAN/JOHN MUSKER

Directors/Screenplay
JOHN MUSKER/RON CLEMENTS

Music
ALAN MENKEN

87 Minutes – Certificate U
(WALT DISNEY)

The Voices of

Ariel	....	JODI BENSON
Ursula	....	PAT CARROLL
Sebastian (crab)	....	SAMUEL E. WRIGHT
Scuttle (seagull)	....	BUDDY HACKETT
Prince Eric	....	CHRISTOPHER DANIEL BARNES
King Triton	....	KENNETH MARS
Chef Louis	....	RENE AUBERJONIS
Flounder (fish)	....	JASON MARIN
Flotsam/Jetsam (eels)	....	PADDY EDWARDS
Carlotta	....	EDIE MCCLURG
Grimsby	....	BEN WRIGHT
Seahorse	....	WILL RYAN

RATINGS VOICE PERFORMANCES 8 DIRECTION 7
SCRIPT 7 PRODUCTION 8 ENTERTAINMENT VALUE 7